

## Baton Rouge, LA – The Advocate

### Jetson shows off its reformed ways

By [SANDY DAVIS](#)

- Advocate staff writer
- Published: Oct 28, 2010

Several years ago, a common sight at Jetson Center for Youth was shackled and handcuffed teenagers clad in orange jumpsuits shuffling across the prison campus under the watchful eyes of uniformed guards.

But things have changed at Jetson, once notorious for violence and brutality.

There are no uniformed guards there anymore and the teens at a luncheon at the facility Wednesday were dressed in khaki pants and polo shirts.

Nearly all of the 74 teens now living at the Baker facility mingled — and were seated at tables — with visitors, including state legislators.

The “Celebration of Change” luncheon honored people who have helped the state with its efforts to reform the juvenile justice system.

Louisiana Supreme Court Chief Justice Kitty Kimball was named the first recipient of the Louisiana Champion of Juvenile Justice Award. She was unable to attend the luncheon.

Mary Livers, the deputy secretary of the state’s Office of Juvenile Justice, credited Kimball, who serves on the state Juvenile Justice Implementation Commission, with helping to push reforms forward and make sure the facility has adequate resources.

“We still have a lot to do,” Livers said. “But we’ve been doing this for a little over a year and we are seeing promising results.”

Instead of using a “corrections approach” — which was used at Jetson in the past and is similar to the way an adult prison is run — Jetson now operates under a therapeutic method.

Deron Brown, the director of Jetson, said the staff are trained in the method, which is modeled after the nationally recognized system in Missouri.

“We are also recruiting a higher-educated staff,” he said.

The average daily population at the facility was reduced over the last two years from more than 200 teenage boys to around 70. The boys range in age from 13 to 20. The state has to release juvenile offenders by their 21st birthday.

About 12 boys live in each dormitory, under the supervision of a group leader.

The teens sitting with the visitors at the luncheon did talk about what their lives are like.

“Things have changed a lot around here,” said Antwon, an Alexandria 16-year-old sent to the facility in an aggravated assault case. (The Office of Juvenile Justice prohibits the release of the boys’ last names.)

Antwon said now when he has a problem, especially with another boy, instead of fighting the kids “circle up” in their dorms with their group leader.

“We talk about what happened and we try to resolve it,” Antwon said. “Usually we end by shaking hands and the problem is over. That doesn’t always happen, but most of the time it does.”

LaDarius, 15, of Baton Rouge, said the staff “want us to do to good. They want us to make it. They tell us that all of the time and we believe them.”

Courtney, 15, of New Iberia, said that if the teens do well, they are rewarded. “One of the biggest things I’ve learned here is teamwork,” he said.

Brown, Jetson’s director, said, “I think one of the biggest changes is: you don’t see fear on the boys’ faces anymore. Now you see hope in our kids.”